BITTERROOT, FLATHEAD AND LOLO NATIONAL FORESTS FOREST PLAN REVISION PROPOSED ACTION

January 23, 2004

INTRODUCTION

The Bitterroot, Flathead and Lolo National Forests have begun the process of revising their Land and Resource Management Plans or as they are commonly known, Forest Plans. These plans are the Forest-level application of the National Strategic Plan, and other National and Regional guidance.

Over the past year, we have done an assessment of the management situation we face now, compared with the situation when the original plans were adopted in the mid-1980s. One result of this assessment has been identification of the following six areas in which there are significant needs for change in the current plans:

Access Management

Ecosystem Management

Management of National Forest and Private Lands Interface Areas

Forest Products Management

Recreation Management

Wilderness Recommendations and Management of Roadless Areas

In addition to the above major revision topics, which are expected to generate alternative management strategies, we will also address a number of other topics which, while important are not expected to differ by alternative. That is, they will probably be addressed in the same manner under any alternative. Examples include our strategic direction on management of Heritage Resources, and possible clarifying language regarding our responsibility for Native American Trust resources.

We have formally started the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) phase of plan revision, with issuance of a revised Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (Federal Register, Tuesday, January 20, 2004, Vol. 69, No. 12, pg. 2699). An earlier Notice published May 10, 2002 in the Federal Register (Vol. 67, No. 91), initiated efforts to revise the forest plans. The comment period for this proposed action will end on April 22, 2004. Please send comments to: Western Montana Planning Zone Revision Team, Lolo National Forest, Fort Missoula, Building 24, Missoula, MT 59804, or email comments to: wmpz@fs.fed.us.

The objective of our Proposed Action is to start a public dialogue that will allow us to identify issues and concerns and develop alternative courses of action that would address those concerns. We have designed our Proposed Action to be detailed enough to generate specific issue statements, but not so detailed as to get ahead of the analysis. Our Proposed Action is organized around the six major revision topics listed above, and described in more detail in our Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS). This and other documents, along with maps, and other information will be available on the Western Montana Planning Zone website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/wmpz/.

ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Finding AM-F1:

In the last few decades, recreation use and demand for motorized access has increased dramatically. There has been a high demand for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use on National Forest lands. While OHV use has increased, the amount of motorized trails for OHV use has not kept up with the demand.

Action AM-F1-A1:

We propose to identify areas with the highest potential for OHV motorized use. Actual changes to existing designated routes would not occur until after future site-specific project level analysis was completed.

Finding AM-F2:

Experience and monitoring shows that unmanaged OHV use is creating a number of undesirable impacts that often have the greatest adverse effects on water quality and wildlife habitat. Other effects may include user-built roads and trails, eroded soils, user conflicts, and negative recreation experience. There is a need for consistent direction across forest boundaries to provide understanding and consistent regulations for the public. In 2001, a Regional Forester decision amended the Bitterroot and Flathead Forest Plans to limit cross-country wheeled motorized travel off of existing routes. The Lolo Forest plan already had OHV limitations in place.

Action AM-F2-A1:

We propose that user-built routes would not be recognized as designated routes as part of the Forest Service trail system unless they have been validated as system routes through site-specific analysis, or permitted under special-use permits.

Action AM-F2-A2:

We propose that cross-country wheeled motorized travel would continue to be prohibited.

Action AM-F2-A3:

We propose to continue recently developed snowmobile direction such as Flathead NF Amendment #24 (Winter Motorized Recreation, preferred alternative) and Lolo NF Amendment #29 (Management Area 11 Snowmobile Use Areas). Current forest snowmobile management would continue, however, there would be changes in some areas. For example, we may change management direction to remedy inconsistencies across jurisdictional boundaries.

Finding AM-F3:

There is a need to modify current road management direction in order to facilitate reasonable access to National Forest Lands, minimize environmental effects, and retain a transportation system that can be maintained with current budgets. A Roads Analysis is required to address existing and future road management options.

Action AM-F3-A1:

We propose to continue the overall trend of decreasing the amount of roads within the National Forest transportation system to a level that can be maintained, while ensuring adequate access for both motorized and non-motorized use. Roads Analysis would provide a basis for managers to conduct a future, more detailed and site-specific analysis related to the transportation system.

Finding AM-F4:

In some areas mountain bike use has increased to the point that user conflicts and resource damage are occurring.

Action AM-F4-A1:

We propose to limit bicycle travel to designated routes and prohibit cross-country bicycle travel.

Finding AM-F5:

Road densities and use of motorized access are restricted to create secure areas for grizzly bears. Demands for motorized access for recreation and other management uses often conflict with grizzly bear security requirements.

Action AM-F5-A1:

We propose to have access management within Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) grizzly bear recovery zones better integrate social concerns with recovery needs of the grizzly bear.

Note: Because access management is inter-related to other resources, it is also addressed in other resource topics in this document.

ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

Finding EM-F1:

Since the current plans were adopted our knowledge has advanced to the point that ecosystem management has become the overall scientific framework for implementing multiple use management, as required by the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act. While the three forests in the zone have incorporated ecosystem management into planning and implementation where possible, there is a need to update our plans to fully incorporate ecosystem management principles.

Action EM-F1-A1:

We propose to use sustainability¹ and viability² as the underlying ecosystem management principles. We propose to use these principles to provide for human needs and to conserve species for present and future generations.

Finding EM-F2:

The exclusion of fire has increased the susceptibility of some vegetative communities to large-scale infestations of insects, disease, and uncharacteristically severe wildland fires. Fires in 2000, 2001 and 2003 burned over 600,000 acres on the Bitterroot, Flathead, and Lolo National Forests. Since 1986, over 1.7 million acres within the zone have been infected with insects and disease. Managed fire can be used to encourage natural processes that provide forage production and wildlife habitat, and to meet other vegetative management objectives. Several current management area allocations do not give managers the flexibility to manage lightning-caused fires or to ignite fires.

Action EM-F2-A1:

We propose to expand the use of management-ignited fire to include wilderness and recommended wilderness areas, and increase the area where natural ignitions are managed for resource benefits.

Action EM-F2-A2:

We propose to use values and ecosystems at risk as primary considerations when managing to reduce the hazard of large-scale insect and disease infestations and severe wildland fires. Examples of values and ecosystems at risk include but are not limited to such things as public and firefighter safety, homes, communication sites, municipal watersheds, and threatened, endangered, sensitive species habitat.

¹ Sustainability: The satisfaction of present needs, without compromising the ability of future generations to also meet their needs.

² Viability: The ability of a population of plant or animal species to persist for some specified time into the future. Viable populations are those whose estimated numbers and distribution of reproductive individuals are believed sufficient to assure the species' continued existence and are well distributed in a given area.

Action EM-F2-A3:

We propose to maintain or restore ecosystems or habitats for species at risk, and utilize management treatments such as thinning and prescribed burning to emulate ecosystem patterns and processes while providing public goods and services.

Finding EM-F3:

Invasive plants are recognized as a major threat to native plant communities especially on disturbed sites and grasslands. Approximately 666,400 acres on the three forests are infested with invasive species. The potential for introduction and spread of invasive species is high in some areas, and there is heightened awareness of the need for education, prevention, and control. The current forest plans do not address the severity and potential for spread of invasive species.

Action EM-F3-A1:

We propose to use an integrated pest management strategy, which uses a combination of mechanical, cultural, chemical, biological control methods, and preventative measures that reflects new information and technology.

Action EM-F3-A2:

We propose to incorporate weed prevention and treatment measures with management activities.

Finding EM-F4:

The current forest plans are inconsistent on how they incorporate new information on ecological processes and conditions to the management of old growth at the landscape scale. Current direction for management of dead, standing trees (*snags*) and down, woody material varies across the three forests. The intent of the forest plan snag guidelines was to retain some vertical structure within timber harvest units. Downed woody material guidelines also focus on timber harvest units.

Action EM-F4-A1:

We propose to modify management direction for old growth, snags, and downed woody material to use consistent definitions. We propose to consider what the historical ranges were at the three forest zone or forest scale and approach those ranges within the capability of changed conditions such as invasive plant species, human development, and fire intensity.

Action EM-F4-A2:

We propose to allow treatments of old growth stands to maintain or restore old growth conditions and reduce threats from disturbances such as insects, disease, wind and fire.

Finding EM-F5:

Disturbances, management activities, and development have fragmented and altered habitat, creating barriers to wildlife movement. Landscape connectivity allows animals to repopulate areas that have suffered local declines and minimize the negative effects of inbreeding. The grizzly bear recovery plan and lynx conservation strategy both call for evaluation of potential linkage zones.

Action EM-F5-A1:

We propose to identify linkage zones at the landscape scale to facilitate species movement and genetic exchange. These areas currently provide, or have the potential to provide, security for wide-ranging wildlife. Management of these areas would have a range of management options, but the emphasis would be to retain or enhance wildlife security and hiding habitat. A broad land ownership adjustment strategy (such as land exchange, conservation easements, land purchase, and right-of-ways) would be developed on the three forests to consider items such as linkage zones, threatened and endangered species and other key components of ecosystem management.

Finding EM-F6:

Activities that leave human-caused food sources of any kind for the grizzly bear are not consistent with the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines, the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, and the plans of the five national forests (Lewis and Clark, Helena, Kootenai, Flathead, and Lolo) in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. A consistent strategy for minimizing human-caused food sources for bears will help prevent conflicts between people and black and grizzly bears, promote public safety, and reduce bear mortality.

Action EM-F6-A1:

We propose to develop consistent guidance on the three forests to eliminate or minimize human-caused food sources for bears.

Finding EM-F7:

During the past several years, science and monitoring have revealed additional information related to the effects of roads on fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, and invasive species. Roads are a major contributor to the following changes that have taken place since approval of the current forest plans.

- 1. Additional terrestrial and aquatic species have been listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, or listed as sensitive by the Forest Service.
- 2. Numerous stream segments have been listed as impaired under the Clean Water Act.
- 3. Many culverts are barriers to fish passage.
- 4. Invasive plant species continue to spread along roads across the three forests.

Action EM-F7-A1:

We propose to develop access management³ goals, objectives, and standards that would better address the needs of big game and other wildlife species, aquatic species, water quality, and invasive species. For example, this could include direction that encourages culvert replacement or road relocation to reduce adverse impacts to aquatic species and water quality. This direction would mainly focus on reducing the miles of road.

Finding EM-F8:

36 Code of Federal Regulation 219.19 requires forests to select management indicator species (MIS). Our current list of MIS differs on the three forests (see table 1) and monitoring them has proven to be complex and costly.

Table 1 - Current Management Indicator Species on the Bitterroot, Flathead and Lolo National Forests

Species	Bitterroot	Flathead	Lolo	Indicator For
Pine Marten	X			Old Growth/Tree Dependent
Pileated Woodpecker	X		X	Old Growth
Mule Deer, Elk, White-Tailed Deer		X		Commonly Hunted
Elk	X		X	Commonly Hunted/Big Game
All Threatened & Endangered Species		X*	X	T & E
All Sensitive Wildlife Species		X*		Sensitive
Northern Goshawk			X	Old Growth
Westslope Cutthroat Trout	X	X		Fish
Sediment Sensitive Invertebrates			X	Fish

^{*} Flathead National Forest Plan Amendment 21 lists the threatened, endangered, and sensitive species that are management indicator species.

Action EM-F8-A1:

We propose to update our management indicator species to better reflect the effects of management activities and to promote consistency where appropriate.

Finding EM-F9:

At the time the forest plans were approved, more emphasis was placed on protecting wildlife and fish from other management activities rather than actively managing and restoring habitat for these resources. Incorporating ecosystem management is a way to achieve multiple-use goals in an integrated manner. Recreation demand and opportunity for hunting, fishing and viewing is evolving and gaining in economic importance.

Action EM-F9-A1:

We propose to continue to contribute to the recovery of threatened and endangered species and manage conditions affecting Forest Service sensitive species to reduce their viability concerns. We also propose to emphasize management of habitat for species important for hunting or viewing.

³ Access management includes all aspects of transportation including roads, trails, and cross-country travel.

Finding EM-F10:

In 1995, the three forest plans were amended by the *Inland Native Fish Strategy* (INFISH), which provides protection and maintenance of aquatic ecosystems, and is designed to prevent further loss of native fish populations. A portion of the Bitterroot National Forest (about 467,000 acres) lies in the State of Idaho, within the Middle Salmon and Upper Selway Sub-Basins, which contain anadromous fish. This portion of the Bitterroot was amended by *Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California* (PACFISH). INFISH and PACFISH include the identification of interim Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs), Riparian Management Objectives (RMOs), and Watershed Analysis requirements. The Riparian Management Objectives (RMOs) contained in INFISH and PACFISH significantly changed the level of consideration for riparian and aquatic resources in all aspects of project-level planning on the three forests.

The Riparian Management Objectives (RMOs) contained in PACFISH and INFISH describe various habitat parameters such as large woody debris, number of pools, temperature, and other habitat attributes that form quality fish habitat. These RMOs are considered to be only starting points. Aquatic habitat components vary widely across geographic areas and development of more site-specific RMOs is encouraged to more accurately reflect the potential of riparian and aquatic habitats. Some of these interim RMOs may not be attainable which indicates the need to develop more site-specific values.

Action EM-F10-A1:

We propose to adopt the majority of the interim management direction contained in INFISH and PACFISH, with minor modifications to Riparian Management Objectives. In addition, we propose to make minor modifications to standards and guidelines to better fit local conditions and capabilities within RHCAs.

Finding EM-F11:

Since the current forest plans were approved, numerous stream segments have been identified as water quality impaired under the Clean Water Act. In addition, several aquatic and terrestrial species have been listed under the Endangered Species Act or listed as Sensitive by the Forest Service. The condition of some forests, grasslands, and shrublands places them at high risk of uncharacteristic disturbance events such as fire, insects, disease, wind throw and invasive species.

There is a need to restore⁴ aquatic, riparian, and upland ecosystems. Because of limited funds, restoration activities need to be focused in areas with the highest potential for

⁴ Restoration involves management activities that improve the health and function of ecosystems and makes them more sustainable over time. Typical restoration work includes projects such as road obliteration or closure, establishment of fish passage, planting trees and shrubs, forest thinning, prescribed fire, and control of invasive species.

improvement. In addition, restoration work needs to be integrated among resource areas to best utilize limited funds.

Action EM-F11-A1:

We propose that each forest develop restoration strategies that:

- a. Identify areas such as watersheds or landscapes having the highest potential for improving ecosystem components through passive and active restoration.
- b. Are flexible with changing resource conditions and new information.
- c. Maintain areas having high ecological integrity⁵.
- d. Integrate aquatic, riparian, upland forest, shrubland and grassland components.
- e. Consider disturbance processes and patterns such as fire, insects, disease, wind throw and invasive species.
- f. Improve social and economic conditions.
- g. Contribute to recovery of listed species.
- h. Integrate State Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) programs.
- i. Facilitate collaboration with external partners.

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⁵ Ecological Integrity is the capability of supporting and maintaining a balanced, integrated, and adaptive community of organisms having species composition, diversity, and functional organization comparable to that of natural habitats of the region (Karr and Dudley 1981).

NATIONAL FOREST AND PRIVATE LAND INTERFACE MANAGEMENT

Finding NF-F1:

Since the plans were adopted, large tracts of private land have been sold and subdivided. This trend is likely to continue. This will increase the amount of homes, structures, and demand for services in the private land and forest interface. The close proximity of people's homes, structures, and daily use to National Forest lands, needs to be reflected in resource management direction. This involves more than just fire and fuels management in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). It includes roads and trails (access), aesthetics, recreation, special uses (such as water lines or driveways), as well as management of vegetation, wildlife, soil, water and fish on NFS lands adjacent to private land. The private land and forest interface boundary may differ from the WUI depending on the resource. In the current forest plans, no special management direction exists for the interface areas.

Action NF-F1-A1:

We propose to consider values and resources at risk when delineating areas that would be managed as private land and forest interface, in order to keep risks to property and other forest values at acceptable levels. Examples of values and ecosystems at risk include, but are not limited to, such things as public and firefighter safety, homes, communication sites, municipal watersheds, and threatened, endangered, sensitive species habitat.

Action NF-F1-A2:

We propose in the interface zone to emphasize social and economic needs over ecological components, where appropriate, due to human population density, development and use.

Action NF-F1-A3:

We propose to retain current Forest Service recreation facilities within the interface areas and improve them to accommodate increasing use.

Action NF-F1-A4:

We propose to work cooperatively with counties, homeowner groups and other groups to address infrastructure needs such as roads and utility development.

Action NF-F1-A5:

We propose to develop land adjustment goals, which encourage open space, other recreation opportunities, and provide reasonable access to NFS lands within the private land and forest interface.

Finding NF-F2:

The influx of people into the private land and forest interface has created a unique situation regarding fuels hazard and risk of wildfire. The amount, size and intensity of fires that occur in the private land and forest interface have increased since the 1980s. Twenty-one percent of the private land within a quarter mile adjacent to NFS lands is classified as moderate to high risk of uncharacteristically severe wildland fire. Fifty-nine

percent of the NFS lands adjacent to private land can sustain high intensity fire under weather conditions commonly experienced during the fire season in Montana. In the past, a wildfire may not have been considered a threat due to its location on forested lands, whereas now it can quickly become a threat to homes, structures and property.

In the current forest plans, each MA lists standards for fire, which includes both prescribed fire and wildland fire. Theses standards do not reflect current terminology and risks. Some of the current direction does not allow the harvest of trees or burning, which are tools to manage fuels, vegetation species composition, density, and structure.

Action NF-F2-A1:

We propose to concentrate fuels management⁶ activities in the interface near areas of moderate and high hazard to wildfire. Live and dead fuels would be managed to reduce likelihood of high-intensity wildland fire threatening values at risk and firefighter safety.

Finding NF-F3:

The influx of human development and disturbance has increased the potential for the introduction and spread of noxious weeds.

Action NF-F3-A1:

We propose to manage and treat invasive plant species using integrated pest management concepts due to the high potential for introduction and spread.

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⁶ Fuels management may include activities such as removal of fuels by thinning, piling, chipping, or burning.

FOREST PRODUCTS

Finding FP-F1:

The National Forest Management Act requires that lands not suitable for timber production be reexamined during forest plan revision. Current forest plans used the best available information to classify National Forest System land as suitable or not suitable for timber production. Since that classification was completed, public desires for public land have become more diverse, better ecological science has revealed the complexity of forest management, and interpretation of environmental law has been clarified.

Action FP-F1-A1:

We propose to review National Forest System lands and reclassify their suitability for timber production based on our current knowledge and understanding of integrated resource management, human need, and public desire. The number of acres classified as suitable for timber production as an emphasis would probably be less than identified in current forest plans.

Action FP-F1-A2:

We propose to exclude inventoried roadless areas from the suitable timber lands. However, timber harvest would still be allowed as one tool for achieving ecosystem health as outlined in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

Action FP-F1-A3:

We propose to exclude the National Forest and private land interface near human development from the suitable timber lands. Management actions in the interface zone may result in limitations on regeneration, reductions in stocking levels and other actions not ordinarily compatible with the long-term production of timber. However, timber harvest would occur where it is the appropriate method of achieving objectives. It is anticipated that these lands would produce a substantial amount and variety of forest products.

Finding FP-F2:

Forest vegetation is dynamic. Modification of vegetation conditions to achieve resource values or management goals is sometimes necessary. Timber harvest is an appropriate and cost effective method to modify vegetation conditions where such activity is compatible with other resource values.

Action FP-F2-A1:

We propose to plan an integrated timber harvest program on: 1) land classified as suitable for timber production, and 2) land classified as not suitable for timber production, where harvest is used as a management tool to achieve vegetation, habitat and social goals. All harvest entries would be based on resource management goals and budgets.

Finding FP-F3:

Recent large disturbance events (fire and insects) resulting in significant tree mortality, combined with declining availability of commercial timber from National Forest System lands have led to some increased public interest in salvage sales. Salvage is a practical approach to using a perishable resource for human needs that can be part of a land and resource restoration program to bring damaged lands back to full productivity.

Action FP-F3-A1:

We propose to encourage salvage logging following fire, insect and disease outbreaks, or other forest disturbance when compatible with management area goals.

Finding FP-F4:

The allowable sale quantity and long-term sustained yield are reference marks to ensure that timber harvest is sustainable over the long-term. The actual amount of timber harvested by the timber sale program may be less than the calculated allowable sale quantity due to budget constraints or because of other resource concerns. Existing plans overestimated our ability to produce forest products on lands with a timber emphasis while meeting other resource needs. This overestimation was due in part to unrealistic budget projections, resource conflicts, large disturbance events (fire and insects) and public controversy. The forest products industry is an important industry on the three Forests that is partially dependent on National Forest System timber resources. An economically viable timber industry needs to be maintained as a partner to help achieve management goals.

Action FP-F4-A1:

We propose to calculate a maximum allowable sale quantity and long-term sustained yield of timber that can be harvested on each forest from the land classified as suitable for timber production, while protecting other resource values. The maximum allowable sale quantity would probably be less than the level allowed in current forest plans.

Finding FP-F5:

Experience implementing the principles of ecosystem management has shown that forest management should focus more on what is left on the landscape than on what is removed. It is important to leave trees in harvest areas for many reasons including snag habitat, reforestation, down woody material, vertical diversity, stand composition, structure and function. Although the clearcut harvest prescription is still appropriate for certain forest types such as lodgepole pine, its use has been dramatically reduced or modified to achieve multiple use values.

Action FP-F5-A1:

We propose to reduce the application of clearcut harvest prescriptions and emphasize the use of seed tree, shelterwood, improvement, thinning, group selection, and salvage harvests from what previous forest plans projected. The clearcut prescription would still be applied to promote the regeneration and growth of species such as aspen, lodgepole pine, paper birch, western larch, western white pine and other shade intolerant plants. Clearcutting would be prescribed only when necessary and determined to be best suited to achieve land management objectives.

Finding FP-F6:

Current forest plans used a variety of rotation ages to project timber yields, but some of the plans used short rotation ages that averaged less than 100 years. While these shorter rotation ages met the legal requirements and were appropriate for short-lived species such as lodgepole pine, they were also applied to long-lived species such as western larch. Forest management should use a range of rotation ages, cutting cycles, and patterns that emulate natural disturbance events.

Action FP-F6-A1:

We propose to use a range of rotation ages, cutting cycles, and patterns based on natural disturbance events to calculate timber yields and manage forests that appear and function more naturally.

Finding FP-F7:

The current forest plans projected a large amount of new road construction. Experience and monitoring have shown that roads or their use often have an adverse effect on water quality. In addition, our budgets are inadequate to maintain the roads we already have. Although it is recognized that roads are needed to support timber harvest, use of existing roads and temporary roads are expected to limit the need for new permanent roads.

Action FP-F7-A1:

We propose to construct fewer permanent roads than projected in current forest plans by emphasizing reconstruction and maintenance of existing roads. Some new temporary and permanent road construction would be expected to support timber harvest activities, primarily on lands classified as suitable for timber harvest. Best management practices would be used for road construction and maintenance to reduce their effects on water quality.

Finding FP-F8:

Harvest and removal of miscellaneous forest products (such as Christmas trees, firewood, landscape shrubs, and mushrooms) and mineral materials (for example, gravel or landscape rock) are emerging and increasing uses of National Forest System lands. Uncontrolled removal of such products can severely impact forest resources. Current plans are largely silent concerning the harvest of miscellaneous products and mineral materials. The Forests need direction for the sale and removal of such products.

Action FP-F8-A1:

We propose to manage miscellaneous forest products and mineral materials to meet multiple use values, support personal and Forest Service use, and contribute to the local economy. Management areas would be identified where this is an appropriate use.

RECREATION AND OUTFITTER AND GUIDE MANAGEMENT

Finding RM-F1:

Developed and dispersed recreation is extremely important to local and national visitors. More people use the forest for recreation than for any other purpose. According to the Columbia River Basin Assessment, recreation use is increasing at 2.3 percent per year and is expected to double in 29 years across the Interior Columbia River Basin. Forest recreation use numbers also indicate this increasing use trend. Demographics of the area suggest that visitation to the forest and surrounding areas will continue to grow.

Action RM-F1-A1:

We propose to manage this increase in use by validating or establishing Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Class (ROS)⁷ for all general forest areas and Opportunity Class (OC)⁸ designations for all proposed wilderness and special designated areas to describe desired future conditions. ROS and OC class would be assigned within management areas. This process would identify a broad array of recreation opportunities depending on the stated desired future condition.

Finding RM-F2:

Increases in use and changing equipment technology have elevated user conflict and contributed to resource damage. Managers need better guidance to help maintain desired conditions, reduce user conflicts and protect resources.

Action RM-F2-A1:

We propose to validate and/or establish management criteria tied to the seven established setting indicators, as defined by the ROS Primer and Field Guide 1990. These indicators would help prescribe actions needed to maintain experience levels and compatibility with other resource values. These prescribed actions would be the basis for a management strategy for each ROS and OC class. Setting indicators include:

Access: The type and mode of travel.

Remoteness: The extent to which individuals perceive themselves removed from the sights and sounds of human activity.

Naturalness: The naturalness of the setting and is tied to the Scenery Management System (SMS).

Facilities Management: The level and type of site development.

Social Encounters: The number and type of other recreationists met along the travel way or camped within sight and sound. It measures experience levels as they refer to degrees of solitude and opportunity for social interaction.

Visitors Impacts: Visitor impacts on the environment.

Visitor Management: The degree that visitors are controlled and the level of information and service provided.

⁷ A system for planning and managing recreation resources that recognizes recreation activity opportunities, recreation settings, and recreation experiences along a spectrum or continuum.

⁸ A system for planning and managing wilderness recreation resources that recognizes wilderness activity opportunities, wilderness settings, and wilderness experiences along a spectrum or continuum.

Finding RM-F3:

Increasing day use activities and technological advances have created new uses and additional demand for different outfitter services. Increased recreational use is contributing to conflicts among users and impacts to the resource. Some recreation and camping facilities exceed their design capacity at heavy use periods. It is anticipated that continued increases in population and use during the planning period would exceed the ability of existing sites to accommodate use and meet demand throughout the managed season.

Action RM-F3-A1:

We propose to manage all recreation activities, including Outfitter Guide use permits, based on the land's ability to accommodate activity without unacceptable resource impacts and diminishing desired experience levels. We would develop trigger points⁹ for early identification of deteriorating experience levels and resource conditions and a tool box of suggested management actions designed to mitigate or change these conditions. Management activities would range from educational (least restrictive), to limited-use permits (most restrictive). Line officers would select, from the toolbox, the appropriate management actions to initiate activities to reverse trend. In some places on the three forests, limiting entry and use could become reality during the planning period.

Finding RM-F4:

Current forest plan direction is limited with respect to outfitter and guide operations and deals more with traditional outfitter activities such as big game hunting, summer progressive trips, and float boat use. Current direction lacks consistency for handling new uses, nontraditional uses, and flexibility in adjusting use seasons, location and user days as well as the determination of how and where to allocate use.

Demand for a greater variety of outfitter services has changed since the creation of the last planning documents. Use limits have been placed on traditional commercial outfitters, primarily in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. Use patterns have changed creating demand for non-traditional services. Technology has increased the number of potential opportunities for service. Interest, requests and proposals are increasing for a finite number of available opportunities for commercial day use activities. Traditional use, such as big game outfitting, has remained static since the signing of the last plan. Non-consumptive use, such as photography, is a fast growing area of interest. Flexibility to move use days to other time periods or outfitted uses in many cases has not been allowed. Forest Plans lack guidance and direction to allow reallocation for different users or time periods.

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⁹ Pre-established and defined conditions that indicate that management action is needed. Monitoring would indicate when these conditions have been met (e.g., Management actions will be taken to manage use when 60% of Persons at One Time (PAOT) capacity is exceeded during 50% of the managed season).

Action RM-F4-A1:

We propose to maintain existing allocation limits where applicable (primarily the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex), but allow flexibility to move use days to shoulder or summer seasons. Days that are in excess of those being used historically, up to the existing limit, could be reallocated to a general pool of temporary days. New outfitters could be considered if existing outfitters do not have the resources to provide the desired services. New uses and allocation to different seasons would be determined based on need and the resource's ability to handle impacts.

Action RM-F4-A2:

We propose to increase permitted day use activities, but limit the number of permits based on existing facilities (trails and trailheads) resource capability (land's ability to handle use without degradation) and need.

Finding RM-F5:

Adjacent forests in Idaho, Wyoming and Eastern Oregon have implemented a zone concept for management of outfitters who conduct long-term operations in the same area (primarily fall hunting use). The system has worked well in those locations and provides managers with a tool to direct those private users to areas where commercial operators are not present. There is a benefit to maintaining outfitter-free areas for public use.

Action RM-F5-A1:

We propose to move toward an area system of outfitter management, where its use would be appropriate in dealing with potential outfitter/public conflict (i.e. the Great Burn). This would focus primarily on operations involving base camps or reserve sites. A similar approach with different guidelines may be applied to roving and day use operations. Changes are not proposed where established outfitter guide programs are working well (i.e. Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex/Mission Mountain Wilderness).

Finding RM-F6:

Current plans do not recognize institutional outfitter groups (for example, educational, church, or non-profit organizations) as an identified category of use. There is no specific direction related to the issuance or management of this type of outfitter. Request for institutional outfitting permits-continues to grow. Direction related to the number and type of permitted service days is lacking.

Action RM-F6-A1:

We propose to recognize the category of institutional outfitter and establish a pool of service days to be used by the public through institutional organizations.

WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS AND ROADLESS AREAS

Recommended Wilderness

Finding WRR-F1: The National Forest Management Act requires that each Forest conduct a roadless inventory in the forest planning process and recommend areas to Congress for designation as wilderness. This process will be used to evaluate Wilderness in accordance with CFR 219.17 and Forest Service Handbook 1909.12.7.

Action WRR-F1-A1:

We propose some modification to the current forest plan recommendations for wilderness (described below) to enhance suitability for designation.

Modifications may include additions and deletions based on new information or existing conditions. Some changes proposed are to make boundaries more manageable and identifiable by following easily identified geographic features. Other changes are proposed to reduce conflict associated with private land and forest interface and accommodate fuels management activities. In addition, changes would avoid conflict with established snowmobile routes.

a. The 1987 Bitterroot Forest Plan recommends wilderness designation for 76,700 acres with high wilderness values. This includes:

Selway-Bitterroot Addition, 48,200 acres Blue Joint, 28,500 acres of the drainage to be added to the adjacent Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness or managed as a separate wilderness.

The proposed changes to recommended wilderness on the Bitterroot National Forest are shown in the table below and on the attached map.

Recommended	Forest Plan	Adjusted Forest	Additions to	Deleted from
Wilderness	Acres	Plan Acres	Forest Plan	Forest Plan

The proposed changes to recommended wilderness on the Flathead National Forest are shown in the table below and on the attached map.

Recommended	Forest Plan	Adjusted Forest	Additions to	Deleted from
Wilderness	Acres	Plan Acres	Forest Plan	Forest Plan
South Fork Flathead	5,187	5,074	0	0
(Limestone Caves Area)				
Middle Fork Flathead	6,295	5,585	0	0
(near Slippery Bill Mtn.)				
Swan Crest	31,783	27,367	1,285	5,603
(Jewel Basin Hiking Area)				
Swan Front (from Holland	54,815	54,477	166	275
Lake to Bunker Creek)				
Total	98,080	92,503	1,451	5,878

Note: Changes in acres, not reflected in additions or deletions, are solely due to changes in mapping technology

c. The 1986 Lolo Plan recommends wilderness designation for 223,600 acres with high wilderness values. This includes:

The Great Burn (Hoodoo) 89,530 acres;

Bob Marshall Addition (Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan) 69,250 acres;

Selway-Bitterroot Addition (Lolo Creek) 3,990 acres;

Sliderock (Quigg) 60,830 acres

The proposed changes to recommended wilderness on the Lolo National Forest are shown in the table below and on the attached map.

Recommended	Forest Plan	Adjusted Forest	Additions to	Deleted from
Wilderness	Acres	Plan Acres	Forest Plan	Forest Plan
The Great Burn/Hoodoo	89,530	88,896	2,331	1,903
Bob Marshall Addition	69,250	69,875	8,540	1,108
Selway-Bitterroot/Lolo Cr.	3,990	3,657	2,602	50
Quigg Sliderock	60,830	55,914	793	3,021
Total	223,600	218,342	14,266	6,082

Note: Changes in acres, not reflected in additions or deletions, are solely due to changes in mapping technology.

Finding WRR-F2:

Areas recommended for wilderness designation were to be managed to maintain and protect existing wilderness character. Interpretation of that direction by Forests and Districts on what activities are degrading to wilderness character and attributes has not been the same. There is disagreement on whether motorized use is appropriate in recommended wilderness. Differences have led to management inconsistencies and confusion for the public, especially in those areas of shared management responsibility.

Action WRR-F2-A1:

We propose to retain the undeveloped, natural appearing, character of the areas recommended for wilderness, and to assure the protection of resource and social attributes. We propose to identify Opportunity Class designations for each area and to provide management direction to protect wilderness values and desired condition. Classes may be semi-primitive non-motorized, primitive or pristine.

Action WRR-F2-A2:

Management direction would encourage primitive uses only, and would not allow snowmobile, other motorized, or bicycle access. Some administrative activities, such as trail maintenance and fire fighting would allow some motorized use. Reasonable access would be provided to valid pre-existing rights

Inventoried Roadless

Finding WRR-F3:

Inventoried roadless areas identified in Appendix C of the Forest Plan FEIS were assigned to a variety of management areas with a range of prescribed management activities. Some were consistent with preserving roadless characteristics while others were assigned to management areas that allowed activities to include road construction, range improvement, timber harvest, recreation development and habitat improvement. Interpretation of what activities are deemed degrading has not been the same. Motorized use, both summer and winter, has increased. User made trails may be degrading roadless character. Controversy exists on whether motorized use should be allowed in these areas. New science has identified the importance of roadless areas for maintaining ecosystem integrity.

Action WRR-F3-A1:

We propose to provide management direction that doesn't allow activities, such as road construction, that would degrade the roadless character, as defined by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR), of inventoried roadless areas. However, reasonable access would be provided to valid pre-existing rights.

Action WRR-F3-A2:

We propose to review and update inventoried roadless areas found in Appendix C of the current forest plans as required by NFMA.

Action WRR-F3-A3:

We propose to identify ROS (Recreation Opportunity Spectrum) designations that would maintain the identified desired condition. Semi-primitive motorized areas would allow for summer-motorized use on designated routes. In the winter, semi-primitive motorized areas would host a wide variety of uses ranging from closed to open. Semi-primitive non-motorized areas and primitive areas would allow only dispersed use of the non-motorized variety but could include mechanized use such as bicycling on designated routes. Management direction would protect the roadless character of the designated area but would allow for other management to occur. This may include vegetation management to restore ecosystem integrity.

Action WRR-F3-A4:

We propose to encourage dispersed recreation activities in roadless areas. Activities may include dispersed camping, bicycling, horseback riding, hunting, hiking, cross country skiing and limited motorized use on designated trails.

Wilderness Dams

Finding WRD-F4:

Numerous privately owned dams exist within the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area in Montana, an area managed by the Bitterroot National Forest. All the dams were built before the 1964 Wilderness Act, and some pre-dated the establishment of the National Forest. Access to, and management of, these aging dams for the purpose of maintenance, operation, reconstruction and breaching is an ongoing issue for both the dam owners and the Forest Service. Forest Service managers continually strive to balance the intent of the Wilderness Act, the rights of the private dam owners, and the strict requirements of federal dam safety regulations in maintaining these dams.

The Bitterroot Forest Plan currently provides little direction on how these dams are to be managed. Direction will need to balance protection of national forest lands and resources, maintain the integrity and purpose of the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness designation, and recognize the legal rights and responsibilities of the dam owners to access, operate and maintain their dams efficiently and in compliance with dam safety standards. There is a need to provide some overall direction in the forest plan on these topics, so that the management approach will be more consistent through time and more visible to dam owners and the general public.

Action WRD-F4-A1:

We propose access to the dams for operation, maintenance, reconstruction and breaching activities would be by primitive means such as stock and/or foot travel, whenever reasonable.

Action WRD-F4-A2:

We propose mechanized access be allowed when analysis indicates this is the most appropriate means in a given situation. Mechanized access would be accomplished in ways that minimize impacts to wilderness values.

Action WRD-F4-A3:

We propose use of light motorized tools, such as chainsaws, motorized drills, compressors as well as explosives, be allowed on the dam structure and impoundment for the purpose of maintaining, operating, reconstructing or breaching the dams. The Forest Service could impose reasonable restrictions on such use to reduce impacts to wilderness values.

Action WRD-F4-A4:

We propose all non-motorized equipment would be allowed on the dam structure and impoundment for the purpose of dam operation, maintenance, reconstruction or breaching.

Action WRD-F4-A5:

We propose storage of equipment be allowed when analysis indicates it is the most appropriate way to achieve operation, maintenance, reconstruction or breaching objectives. Equipment storage would be accomplished in ways that minimize impacts to wilderness values.

Finding WRD-F5:

Existing legislation for the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area and Wilderness, located on the Lolo National Forest, allows for the maintenance of dams found within the designated area. There is no need for change with respect to dam maintenance.

Action WRD-F5-A1:

None

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Finding ME-F1:

Monitoring, evaluating and reporting are key communication tools internally that can build knowledge and improve management effectiveness.

Monitoring evaluation reports on the current plans have noted that:

- Some sampling designs are inefficient.
- Monitoring data often does not allow comparing results across forests and may not be done at the proper scale.
- Monitoring and evaluation requirements are limited in focus.
- Monitoring is not integrated across resource areas.
- Most monitoring has emphasized project implementation and not the effectiveness of meeting management goals.

Actions ME-F1-A1:

We propose that the forest plans develop new monitoring strategies that:

- Are conducted to answer specific questions.
- Are done at the appropriate spatial and temporal scale to answer the questions.
- Are done in collaboration with others.
- Use the best available science to collect and evaluate the data.
- Are feasible, realistic, affordable and adaptable.
- Focus more on outcomes (effectiveness) in addition to actions (implementation).
- Emphasize evaluation as much as the collection of data.